

# Unearthing the Buried City

## *The Janet Translation Project*

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This document is part of *Unearthing the Buried City: The Janet Translation Project*, a series of AI-assisted English translations of Pierre Janet's works.

In his seminal 1970 book: *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*, Henri Ellenberger wrote:

*Thus, Janet's work can be compared to a vast city buried beneath ashes, like Pompeii. The fate of any buried city is uncertain. It may remain buried forever. It may remain concealed while being plundered by marauders. But it may also perhaps be unearthed some day and brought back to life (p. 409).*

This project takes Ellenberger's metaphor seriously — and literally. The goal of this work is to unearth the buried city of Janet's writings and make them accessible to the English-speaking world, where much of his legacy remains obscured or misunderstood.

Pierre Janet was a pioneer of dynamic psychology, psychopathology, hypnosis, and dissociation. His influence on Freud, Jung, and the broader psychotherapeutic tradition is profound, yet the bulk of his original writings remain untranslated or scattered in partial form. These AI-assisted translations aim to fill that gap — provisionally — by making Janet's works readable and searchable in English for the first time.

This is not an academic translation, nor does it claim to replace one. It is a faithful, literal rendering produced with the aid of AI language tools such as Chat GPT and DeepL and lightly edited for clarity. Its purpose is preservation, accessibility, and revival. By bringing these texts to light, I hope to:

- Preserve Janet's contributions in a readable English form
- Spark renewed interest among scholars, clinicians, and students
- Inspire human translators to produce definitive, academically rigorous editions

## Contemporary Spiritism<sup>1,2</sup>

Pierre Janet

The doctrines, so curious, that have been taught for half a century under the name of *spiritism*, have always seemed to us worthy of attracting the attention of the philosopher. Even if it were demonstrated that these semi-scientific inquiries and these semi-religious beliefs contain no true and useful notion, it would still be necessary to know them, at least superficially, in order to understand the state of public opinion in our time. But this is certainly not the case, and spiritist beliefs would not have developed with such rapidity if they had not been supported, at least in their beginnings, by some observation that was easy to repeat and sufficiently true to convince the incredulous. The investigations we have had the opportunity to carry out in the past through the various spiritist works not only had historical importance, but on several occasions brought us practical instruction. They introduced us to procedures and phenomena that were not always impossible to use and verify. We continue to believe that it is the spiritists who first drew attention to subconscious movements and to the extraordinary manifestations of mental disaggregation. Now facts of this kind, such as automatic writing, for example, are not mere curiosities; they are extremely important documents for understanding the human mind. Moreover, they provide us with procedures that we increasingly value for studying and even treating mental illnesses. A quite natural recognition leads us to follow with sympathy the works and developments of a sect which had, in its early days, some happy discoveries.

In a previous work we have already briefly summarized the principal facts in the history of spiritism;<sup>3</sup> but we did not pursue this historical study up to absolutely contemporary works: we had stopped it around 1882 or 1883. This date was not chosen arbitrarily, but rather because it seemed to correspond to something real and to mark an epoch in some way in the history of spiritism. During recent years, in fact, the partisans of this doctrine no longer found themselves, at least in my opinion, in the same situation as before. For a long time the mediumistic phenomena, the subconscious acts of the medium, were ridiculed and especially ignored. This pathological type of medium, so curious and in reality so well described by the spiritists, was absolutely unknown, both to doctors and to psychologists. Instead of analyzing the facts, discussing them, and comparing them to other similar nervous manifestations, people refused to see them, and the spiritists were left to themselves, without prior knowledge and without sufficient means of study; they naturally abandoned themselves to dreams

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<sup>1</sup> Janet, Pierre. "Le spiritisme contemporain," *Revue Philosophique*, xxxiii (1892), I, pp. 413-442.

<sup>2</sup> *Proceedings of the International Spiritist and Spiritualist Congress* of 1889 held in Paris, from September 9 to 16. Librairie spirite, 1890, 1 vol. in-8, 454 pp. — Eugène Nus, *À la recherche des destinées*. Marpon, 1891, 1 vol. in-12, 303 pp. — Alfredo Pioda, *Memorabilia*. Bellinzona, 1891, 1 vol. in-12, 526 pp. — *Les Revues spirites*.

<sup>3</sup> *Automatisme Psychologique*, 1889, p. 376.

and to the most naïve superstitions. Well then, for about the past ten years, the situation has been quite different: the progress of psychological studies and of studies in nervous medicine has quite naturally led minds to concern themselves with phenomena that one could now study and understand. The first doctors who studied hypnotism scientifically, the members of the *Society for Psychical Research* in London, the advocates of experimental psychology, and finally a large number of authors who had enough authority to be heard, have come forward to publicly declare the undeniable reality of the principal mediumistic phenomena. Automatic writing in particular, that central phenomenon, the only one in fact that Allan Kardec seriously concerned himself with, was affirmed without any hesitation. It is true that these facts were submitted to a deeper analysis and more serious criticism, and that their study did not lead the investigators back to the dogmas of the “Book of Spirits.” But the discussion of doctrines does not eliminate this important event, the almost official confirmation of the reality of the facts reported by the early spiritists; and we had reason to say that spiritism had entered a new period. It was therefore interesting to investigate what the principal representatives of this sect thought of this evolution, how they understood it, how they had profited from it. Had they taken part in this scientific movement by examining with more precision the phenomena discovered by others? Had they studied the various interpretations proposed, or were they sincerely working to correct the inevitable inaccuracies of earlier theories by attempting to clarify the once-mysterious character of their séances? This was obviously a very interesting inquiry, and one that would quite naturally complete our earlier works on spiritism. Unfortunately, we hasten to say, it is very difficult to carry it out in a complete manner, and it would require far too much time and effort. We merely wish to analyze a few spiritist volumes that were sent to the *Revue philosophique* and on this occasion to summarize in a general and brief way the current state of spiritism.

## I

The first observation that must strike us is that the believers of this small church are still quite numerous. I do not dare say that they are more numerous than before, for it must be noted, as we shall see, that they are very divided among themselves; and one is liable to group under the name of spiritists individuals of very different opinions, who do not agree at all even on essential points. They are still grouped in circles, in schools according to their natural affinities; thus one finds in many cities of France societies that gather to invoke the souls of ancestors. Circles like those of Marseille, Reims, and other cities are significant and seem to have a certain activity. Moreover, more profane concerns such as politics and even, we do not hesitate to acknowledge, charity, occupy part of the meetings, which are not always devoted to spirits. In Paris, one could name, I believe, eight such circles of varying seriousness, which publish the agenda of their meetings, have their official mediums, and summon their members to such and such evocations. Certain of these societies have specific purposes. “A society has been founded for the development of mediumship... it is functioning and has

taken the name of *Society of Scientific Spiritism*”;<sup>4</sup> “it is a new experimental and philosophical spiritualist school based on an essentially progressive and scientific method... here leading mediums train others in mediumship under their direction.”<sup>5</sup> There is a society which, if it functions well, must be preparing a curious collection of neuropaths and hysterics. Other groups are connected to foreign societies; the Theosophical Society, which was founded in New York in 1875, has branches and some representatives in France. It proposes very noble aims: (1) to form the nucleus of a universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of sex, rank, or creed; (2) to study religions and philosophies, especially those of antiquity and the Orient, in order to demonstrate that a single truth lies hidden beneath their differences; (3) to study the unexplained laws of nature and to develop the psychic powers of man. But this society, very important in English-speaking countries, plays a more modest role in France. The *Revue spirite* claims (but should one fully trust a rival?) that the theosophical school is reduced to eight members in France.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, another society is much noisier: “it is the independent group for *esoteric studies* with the supreme council of the Martinist Order and the free university of Higher Studies.”<sup>7</sup> Its philosophical program is very simple: “to move beyond the purely metaphysical methods of the academics, to move beyond the purely physical methods of the positivists, in order to unite in a single synthesis science and faith, the visible and the occult, the physical and the metaphysical... etc.” The representatives of occultism, the magi who lead this school, claim to have already formed 52 distinct groups in France—but magi may exaggerate. These various schools are far from being in agreement, and we shall have to speak later of their terrible conflicts.

To express their theories and defend their cause against their fraternal enemies, each society almost always has a journal, which appears more or less frequently and more or less regularly. Already in 1876, the *Revue spirite* announced the existence of 46 journals devoted to the study of mediumistic phenomena and spread throughout the world.<sup>8</sup> Since then, their number has at least doubled, for 88 spiritist journals were represented at the 1889 congress. Spain alone has a dozen, all representing independent groups; there are 4 in Cuba, 4 in Mexico, 3 in Brazil, 5 in the Argentine Republic, 2 in Italy, 3 very important ones in Germany: *Sphinx*, directed by Baron Karl du Prel, which seems to have a more philosophical character; *Psychische Studien*, in Leipzig; *Spiritualische Blätter*, in Berlin; one notes also 1 journal in Russia, 1 in Sweden, 2 in the Netherlands, 3 in Belgium, and in England: *The Light*, *The Lucifer*, *The Herald of Health*, *The Two Worlds*, etc.; 5 in America: *The Banner of Light*, *The Celestial City*, *The Modern Thought*, etc.<sup>9</sup> At present, there are at least 14 in France: the *Revue spirite*, the oldest of these journals, founded by Allan Kardec himself, *Le*

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<sup>4</sup> *Revue spirite*, 1891, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*, p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> *Revue spirite*, 1894, p. 84.

<sup>7</sup> *L'Initiation*, July 1894, p. 84.

<sup>8</sup> Two in Germany, 2 in Austria, 2 in Belgium, 2 in France, 3 in Italy, 8 in England, 6 in Spain, 1 in Turkey, 1 in Egypt, 1 in Australia, 9 in the United States, 3 in Mexico, 2 in Brazil, 2 in Peru. (*Revue spirite*, 1876, p. 205.)

<sup>9</sup> *Proceedings of the International Spiritist Congress of 1889*, p. 31.

*Moniteur spirite, Le Messenger, Le Devoir, La Lumière, Le Spiritisme, L'Aurore, Les Sciences mystérieuses, L'Étoile, La Curiosité, La Religion laïque, La Religion de l'avenir, La Vie posthume*, devoted to the study of the solidary and natural relations that connect earthly humanity to supraterrrestrial humanity. *Le Lotus*, which was recently transformed into a more modestly formatted journal under the name *Lotus bleu*, represents the school of the theosophists; *L'Initiation* reveals the occultism of the magi.

The books published by the spiritists in recent years are so numerous that it is impossible to have gone through them all, and we cannot even list them here. The principal ones can be found announced in the proceedings of the Spiritist Congress<sup>10</sup> and in the catalogs of two bookstores more or less specifically devoted to these publications: the *Librairie spirite*, 1 rue Chabanais, and the *G. Carré Bookstore*, 112 boulevard Saint-Germain. These works are written in all sorts of forms: sometimes they are narratives, novels, dialogues, poems; most often, unfortunately, they are long and vague metaphysical lucubrations. The work of Mr. Nus, *In Search of Destinies*, is one of the most interesting, as it contains in a clear and lively style a summary of most of the other doctrines; although the author does not hide his preferences, he knows, when absolutely necessary, how to express reservations—and even, on occasion, to smile. The spiritists also publish many translations and new editions of older works—for example, the work of Sir Alfred Russel Wallace, *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism*, translated into French. A German bookstore is publishing by subscription a translation of Allan Kardec's works, beginning with *Heaven and Hell*. We are surprised by this choice; it is the most foolish and most boring of the spiritist works, which will give a sad impression of the French spirit. Above all, we must mention the work of Mr. A. Pioda; it is the Italian translation of the most important works published by scholars of high standing on the physical phenomena of spiritism. It contains the complete collection—difficult to obtain elsewhere—of articles and treatises by Crookes on movements produced at a distance; it also includes the works of Thury, the famous physicist from Geneva, who took up and partially confirmed Gasparin's experiments on table levitation without contact. The other excerpts seem to us less significant, but one must have read these famous pieces in order to speak sensibly about these questions, and we must thank Mr. Pioda for having assembled in one volume these classics of spiritism. Let us also call the reader's attention to the lecture by Mr. E. Jung: *Hypnotism and Spiritism: Established Facts, Alleged Facts*, Geneva, 1890; and in the book by Dr. Edmond Dupouy, *Medical Middle Ages*, a curious chapter on spiritism, Paris, 1890.

Finally, the spiritist movement has recently manifested in a rather remarkable way. During the 1889 Exposition, spiritists of all schools organized a great congress, which was held from September 9 to 16 in the hall of the Grand Orient, and which counted no fewer than 40,000 adherents. No doubt, the various members of the congress were far from agreeing even on the essential beliefs, and they had only suspended their quarrels for a moment; a very large number undoubtedly did not in any way deserve the name of spiritists. But a gathering of such magnitude is nonetheless an important event: it shows that these studies and

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<sup>10</sup> *Congrès spirite*, etc., p. 29.

beliefs are being received with curiosity and sympathy, and that they correspond to a need of the mind that is increasingly manifesting itself. The spiritists were very proud—and understandably so—of the success of their congress; in all the speeches, which were numerous, people took pleasure in comparing the old spiritism, everywhere mocked and ridiculed, with the current triumph of the holy doctrine. Foreign delegates sent numerous congratulations to the French spiritists and repeatedly expressed feelings of brotherhood, which are among the best outcomes of such congresses. Let us be permitted to recall the short speech of a Spanish delegate, who offered to all the French a greeting as eloquent as it was kind: “I am going to attempt a true tour de force; I am going to try to express myself in your beautiful language, so unfamiliar to me. I therefore ask you not to pay attention to the words I will speak, but to the ideas they represent, and which all convey the expression of a heart that loves you—spiritists and non-spiritists, friends and adversaries, even enemies, if I have any, which I prefer not to know.”<sup>11</sup> Mr. Huelbes Temprado is right to say—and he must be convinced of it—that the adversaries of spiritism are not enemies, but rather friends joined with it in the search for the same truth.

The active members of the congress were divided into four sections: the first was devoted to the study of spiritist phenomena properly speaking, with an emphasis on physical phenomena; the second focused on philosophy and social questions, and proclaimed, in somewhat pompous form, the principal propositions of spiritualism; the third section was titled *occultism* and highlighted the main points of dissimilarity between the old classical spiritism and the newer schools, more pretentious and more obscure; the fourth section formed the propaganda committee, and it proposed regulations to organize the new religion throughout the entire world.<sup>12</sup> One of the proposals that was made does not seem to us today to have much chance of being realized anytime soon; a member seriously requested “the creation of a chair in magnetism and spiritism in all the Faculties of France.”<sup>13</sup> Finally, the formation “of the league of the disincarnate and the incarnate to hasten the coming of the new era” was the final word of this world congress.<sup>14</sup>

All the proceedings of the congress were gathered into a very well-prepared volume: *The Proceedings of the Spiritist and Spiritualist Congress of 1889*, whose principal editors were Messrs. Papus, Auzanneau, Laurent de Faget, and G. Leymarie. Alas! Not all the congresses that met during that period had proceedings compiled with such care. In this rather voluminous book, one will find all the information that may be useful for a study of spiritism.

## II

When we undertook to review the latest publications of the spiritists, we had in mind a line of inquiry that particularly interested us. We had personally taken

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<sup>11</sup> *Congrès spirite*, p. 173.

<sup>12</sup> *Congrès spirite*, pp. 90 and following.

<sup>13</sup> *Congrès spirite*, p. 207.

<sup>14</sup> *Congrès spirite*, 1891, p. 5.

part in the studies of French and English physiologists on subconscious phenomena, and we had presented in a recent work a description and reasoned interpretation of the acts of the medium. A feeling of curiosity—which one may understand and excuse—led us to investigate what the high priests of spiritism had thought of these discussions. Our studies concerned several very specific points; we had examined a well-defined group of phenomena: the intelligent acts that the medium performs seemingly unconsciously. This is obviously not the whole of spiritism, but it constitutes a large part of it. Not all spiritists, no doubt, have had the good fortune to see sugared almonds fall from the ceiling or couches float through the air, but all have seen mediums write unconsciously while speaking of something else. This is the phenomenon that struck them; it is the phenomenon upon which the spiritist religion is founded; it is by means of this unconscious writing that *The Book of Spirits* was composed. A study of this phenomenon, undertaken over the past fifteen years by Mr. Richet, Mr. Gurney, Mr. Myers, and by ourselves, ought, it seems to me, to interest the disciples of Allan Kardec. The conclusions to which we were led by the study of this phenomenon were likewise quite simple:

(1) This curious fact presented by the medium is analogous—indeed, identical in all its details—to phenomena observed in nervous diseases, in hysteria, in induced somnambulism.

(2) All these phenomena follow laws and are explained in the same way by a serious disturbance in the mental operation of perception, which we have described under the name of *psychological disaggregation*. Similar suppositions had already been made in a vague manner, but—except in the last ten years—had not been supported by precise analyses and experiments.

So I expected, I admit, to see all the articles of the *Society for Psychical Research* and all the work I had done myself discussed thoroughly and rigorously. I even expected to find in these critiques suggestions for new lines of research, interesting distinctions between the medium and the hysteric, beneficial modifications to be made to these theories. Well, it must be said with sadness: this hope was completely disappointed. The most ignorant men in regard to all the studies relating to the medium are precisely those who exploit the medium, and not one of the spiritists deigned to seriously study the serious work that had been done at their prompting. We are obliged, in order to find the psychological discussions of the spiritists, to glean here and there a few vague allusions and to respond to criticisms that are barely hinted at.

From time to time, indeed, the spiritists allude to the research of scientists, as if they had vaguely heard of it. “Experience shows us, with still a very faint light,” says an editor of *La Vie posthume*, “that a good portion of so-called spiritist phenomena may well be independent of any extra-human determinism.”<sup>15</sup> Mr. C. Coignet does not want all the messages from spirits to be shown to the uninitiated; some of them too closely resemble human dreams and might lend themselves to ridicule. “We must not make the doctrine laughable by claiming that the spirits to whom these communications are attributed have, since their disincarnation, lost everything they knew on earth—even the language they spoke and wrote with

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<sup>15</sup> *Vie posthume*, 1887, p. 187.

such purity.”<sup>16</sup> Mr. Nus also admits that there are absurd messages: “Those who believe there is something here analogous to the unconsciousness of dreams are probably correct on one aspect of the question.”<sup>17</sup> “The facts of spiritism,” says a member of the congress, “are not always repeatable; there is in these facts a subjective element that is quite difficult to separate from the objective fact.”<sup>18</sup>

These various authors seem to have come under the influence of psychological research and to sense its importance.

Most often, it is not so; true believers concede nothing to the research of laymen and respond only with contempt—and even insult. “This undertaking (the congress) is nothing less than the affirmation of the same message, the challenge hurled at obscurantism, at the persecuting and irrational intolerance of the academies and the churches.”<sup>19</sup> “You all come to enlist as simple soldiers under the folds of the flag that unites us to combat the common enemy: nihilism<sup>20</sup>... etc.” It is unnecessary to multiply citations of this kind to convey the usual tone of spiritist discussion: to properly understand their works, one must simply know that every religious man is referred to as a sacristan, every scientist as an academic, and every doctrine outside of spiritism by the strange name nihilist materialism; and these three expressions, which they consider to be grave insults, are repeated on nearly every page.

We have, however, found with great satisfaction a few pages where the psychological discussion is carried out a bit more seriously: an unfortunately too brief article from the *Revue spirite*<sup>21</sup>, a much more substantial piece published without an author's name in the *Nouvelle Revue*<sup>22</sup>, and some interesting passages from the work of Mr. Nus<sup>23</sup>. Perhaps other discussions of this kind have appeared elsewhere; I regret not having discovered them. The three studies I have just mentioned, along with a few other passages of lesser importance, are the only ones I have read which seem to me to warrant a response.

In their critiques, the spiritists often make historical remarks and claim priority for certain discoveries: “The existence of hypnotic phases in mediums, the progressive transformation of hypnotic subjects into spiritist mediums... are things that I had already described in 1870,” Mr. Bourgery tells us in the *Moniteur spirite*.<sup>24</sup> That is possible, although I do not recall having read in the old spiritist journals any studies sufficiently clear in this regard; but it must be admitted that if the author did indeed notice this important fact, he showed little concern for understanding it or for seeking out its consequences—for he would have been led quite far from spiritism. Moreover, many authors—and especially Charpignon—had made observations of this kind; what remained was to verify their generality and to explain them.

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<sup>16</sup> *Congrès spirite*, p. 209.

<sup>17</sup> E. Nus, *A la recherche des destinées*, p. 206.

<sup>18</sup> *Congrès spirite*, p. 131.

<sup>19</sup> *Congrès spirite*, p. 403.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*, p. 78

<sup>21</sup> *Revue spirite*, 1891, p. 296.

<sup>22</sup> *Nouvelle Revue*, March 1 and 15, 1861.

<sup>23</sup> *A la recherche des destinées*, p. 216.

<sup>24</sup> *Moniteur spirite*, 1891, p. 99.



Another historical remark addressed to us in a rather impolite manner is nonetheless important. It appears that the famous experiments attributed to Chevreul on the registering pendulum are merely the reproduction of earlier research. The experiments of General Noizet are absolutely analogous and were carried out in 1808, whereas those of Chevreul date from 1812. This may well be the case—if one accepts without question what General Noizet states in his memoir on somnambulism, published only in 1854.<sup>25</sup> We take this opportunity, moreover, to express our regret at not having been able to give sufficient importance to the very remarkable work of General Noizet, which directly inspired a great number of studies later presented as original. But we had imposed upon ourselves a strict rule: not to cite any works without having them in hand and without having ourselves verified their value. This was necessary in order to avoid those detestable summaries of the history of magnetism that various authors shamelessly borrow from one another. At the time, we were unable to obtain General Noizet's work. The same is true for a very curious but rare book—Pétetin's *On Animal Electricity*—but this last oversight has fortunately been corrected thanks to the article devoted in the *Revue* by Mr. A. Bertrand to the famous magnetizer.<sup>26</sup>

Let us now move on to some critiques presented in a more or less vague manner, which seem to concern the substance of the theory. We observe that the discussions are primarily metaphysical and almost all resemble what is commonly called a conflict of tendencies. The spiritists repeatedly assert that the theory of psychological disaggregation is a materialist theory.<sup>27</sup> “If it is the soul that disaggregates, then it is not simple, it is not one? That is to say, it does not exist; and indeed, in order to understand this hypothesis, one must admit that the consciousness which constitutes our personality—not simple and one, but synthetic—is none other than our brain; here disaggregation can occur, a portion of the brain removed from the synthesis of its elements grouped for a common purpose would form, as it were, a separate brain that would have its own consciousness: this is pure materialism.”<sup>28</sup> Words do not frighten us, and modern materialism, which is indistinguishable from the most refined idealism, has nothing contemptible about it. Are all the authors who, with Leibniz, have admitted the multiplicity of elements in the human mind therefore materialists? And finally, what do these metaphysical reveries mean in the face of incontestable facts? The hysteric or the medium presents us only with a relatively mild disaggregation, while in the maniac and especially in the demented individual, the mind is not merely disaggregated but dissolved and reduced to a veritable mental dust. Must we then deny the existence of dementia simply to avoid the accusation of materialism?

Other critiques have a logical character and reproach the theory of disaggregation for being contradictory and incomprehensible. “What! By

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<sup>25</sup> *Mémoire sur le somnambulisme et le magnétisme animal*, addressed in 1820 to the Royal Academy of Berlin and published in 1854 by General Noizet, p. 400.

<sup>26</sup> A. Bertrand, *Un précurseur de l'hypnotisme*. (*Revue philosophique*, 1891, II, p. 192.)

<sup>27</sup> *Revue spirite*, 1891, p. 299.

<sup>28</sup> *Nouvelle Revue*, 1891, p. 358.

psychological disaggregation—that is to say, in the true sense of the word, by cerebral disaggregation—I would be at once a conscious self, and another equally conscious self, whose consciousness would escape my own and who would still be myself? That is unintelligible.”<sup>29</sup> Does Mr. X seriously believe that I have considered the same moral personality to be both one and divided at the same time? What is divided is the collection of psychological or physiological phenomena, and each of the resulting groups assumes that apparent unity which is called a personality. This may be inaccurate, but it is not contradictory. Moreover, the spiritists themselves speak no differently when they attribute to some spirit the possession and use of a part of the medium’s body. The set of physiological and psychological phenomena occurring in the medium’s body is thus divided in two—without there being anything unintelligible in this.

The psychological discussions would have particularly interested us; unfortunately, they are exceedingly rare. Mr. X makes only one precise remark of this kind: citing some of my experiments, he notes that the second personality escaped a hallucination suggested to the first; therefore, he says, this second personality is not suggestible, therefore it is superior to humanity and represents a spirit superior to our world.<sup>30</sup> The argument, it must be admitted, does not affect us much; suggestibility, as we have shown, is a very variable trait, and its absence would not immediately prove that one is dealing with an archangel. Moreover, it is easy to see, just a few lines later, that suggestions can be made to the second personality just as to the first, and that it is most often very docile.

The study of the medium raises a great number of problems that are exclusively medical, and the spiritists—who frequently, according to their own claims, have occasion to observe individuals of this kind—could easily gather documents of serious value. Automatic writing, in fact, like all psychophysiological phenomena that depend on such multiple conditions, does not always appear with mathematical regularity; it has extremely variable characteristics and may at first seem to be devoid of regular laws. It seems necessary to us, in order to study it, to apply here the method constantly taught to us by our eminent master, Professor Charcot, and which served him in demonstrating order and determinism in a great number of nervous phenomena that were once also regarded as protean.

One must seek out and study the simple, typical case that presents the phenomenon in its highest degree, surrounded by the circumstances most capable of making it understandable, and of which all other cases appear to be weakened and more complicated copies. It is only after having properly chosen this typical case that one can approach the more complex ones. To make such a choice is undoubtedly to formulate a hypothesis—but one cannot reason without hypotheses, and this one is justified by its usefulness and fruitfulness. Now, we have previously described what constitutes the typical case of automatic writing, and we have no reason to change that description. The clearest automatic writing is observed:

(1) in a hysterical subject; (2) when she has deep tactile and muscular anesthesia

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<sup>29</sup> *Nouvelle Revue*, 1891, p. 359.

<sup>30</sup> *Nouvelle Revue*, 1891, p. 358.

on the right side; (3) when, on the other hand, she has indisputable somnambulistic episodes characterized by amnesia upon waking; (4) when one observes, in the subconscious writing, the memory of these somnambulistic states which seem to be forgotten during waking consciousness.

But alongside this typical and highly instructive case, one may encounter a thousand variations, and it is these variations that must be carefully studied—either to relate them back to the original model, or to oppose them to that model by demonstrating that they are more significant and may be better explained. Thus we have frequently observed and extensively described cases in which automatic writing does not clearly correspond to somnambulism, with the memories not being absolutely reciprocal. This can be explained by the infinite variety of somnambulistic states and all the changes that can occur in the grouping of sensations and images. It is possible—though I have not seen it—that automatic writing exists in subjects who, on the surface, do not present any somnambulism. These subjects might stop at a hemi-somnambulism, and for one reason or another, the experimenters may not have been able to fully bring the disaggregated phenomena to light. Conversely, we have thoroughly analyzed subjects in whom automatic writing is not accompanied by right-side hemi-anesthesia; we have shown by what artifice the same phenomena could be obtained in subjects with left-side hemi-anesthesia. Finally, through precise experiments, we believe we have demonstrated that in certain cases, distraction is absolutely equivalent to anesthesia and can produce exactly the same effects in subjects who, during the rest of their lives, exhibit no localized or permanent insensitivity. We were very pleased to see that this important point of our studies received remarkable confirmation from the research of Mr. William James on some American mediums. Their right hand, says the author, is not anesthetic, but it becomes so when they place it on the planchette and write unconsciously.<sup>31</sup> There remains the final point, one of the most curious to discuss: is the medium always hysterical? Probably not; we have just observed in Professor Charcot's service an individual who very clearly exhibited somnambulism and automatic writing. He had fixed ideas, doubts, etc.; he was mentally ill—degenerate, if you will—but he was not hysterical, unless we strip that word of all precise meaning. It was in anticipation of such cases that we had considered mental disaggregation to be a broader illness than hysteria—one that may manifest through hysterical symptoms, but may also appear in other forms. What are these forms? What is their relationship to hysteria? How is automatic writing modified in such cases? These are problems that could be solved through the observation of numerous mediums. The spiritists, who complain that not enough attention is paid to them, will no doubt take it as a point of honor to provide us with extensive information on this subject.

Alas! Our disappointment is profound. One of them solemnly declares that the medium cannot have a brain illness since he lives to be eighty years old.<sup>32</sup> Does he happen to be unaware that there are patients in asylums who are eighty years

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<sup>31</sup> William James, *Notes on automatic writing*. Proceedings of the American Society for psychical research, 1889, p. 549.

<sup>32</sup> *Revue spirite*, pp. 189, 300.

old and have been delusional for fifty years without realizing it? Another solemnly affirms that mediums are not hysterical because their communications are always very pure and very elevated. Mr. Nus contents himself with referring me to Mr. de Rochas, who declares his subjects free of all illness,<sup>33</sup> as if we were reverting definitively to the method of authority and weighty authors. In a word, we see them all revolt at the thought that their subjects might be ill, and solemnly assert that they are neither somnambulists nor hysterics;<sup>34</sup> but not one offers any proof of what he claims, not one concerns himself with calmly and impartially describing the condition of his medium.

Finally, these few discussions against the theses of experimental psychology all end in the same way. The authors, after having defended their mediums' automatic writing for a moment, declare that, after all, that is not the point. The true spiritist phenomena are levitations without contact, floating objects, spirit photographs, and direct writing. The pen is not held by the hand of the medium—it lifts itself and walks alone across the paper. No author claims to have seen these phenomena himself, but he echoes the gossip without scruple and sets it in opposition to serious studies. But very well, let us accept these legends as true: what relation do they have to the question at hand? Was *The Book of Spirits* obtained by direct writing? Do we see tables flying and bouquets appearing at all the spiritist séances held daily in Paris? Certainly not—it is always the medium who speaks in somnambulism or who writes subconsciously. It is this fact that is under discussion and which the spiritists do not defend; or if they accept the psychological explanation of this one phenomenon while reserving judgment on all the rest, then let them remove it from their séances. Let them restrict themselves to photographing spirit apparitions—this will be more correct from the scientific point of view and less dangerous to public health.

### III

Since the spiritist books and journals contain very few discussions of interest to us, they must be studied from another point of view: by examining the descriptions of the observed phenomena and the reports of the séances. This reading, we believe, leaves a very clear impression—namely, that spiritist literature has changed greatly over the past ten years, since that moment which we consider to mark an era in its history. The studies of scientific psychology, which did not seem to provoke much opposition or have a direct influence, have nevertheless had a quite considerable indirect influence.

The spiritist journals that appeared around 1870 or 1875 are extremely interesting for the psychologist. I do not think I am exaggerating in saying that a psychology student ought to be advised to read the *Magnetic or Spiritist Review* from that period. These journals were constantly filled with physical and moral descriptions of mediums—they were curious collections of observations in pathological psychology. And since these examinations were inspired by a sort of religious sentiment that stood in for scientific spirit, they were meticulously

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<sup>33</sup> E. Nus, *A la recherche des destinées*, p. 220.

<sup>34</sup> *Revue spirite*, pp. 91, 369.

accurate. Today, in reading them, one can amuse oneself by making retrospective diagnoses and identifying precisely all our types of nervous and mentally ill patients.

Research of this kind is not useless; it shows us the same facts, no doubt, but in a different context—observed without bias by people who did not share our current ideas—and it offers us a remarkable confirmation of the work we can carry out ourselves. I admit that I was often personally very pleased to find, in the midst of the account of a beautiful spiritist séance, mingled with prayers and invocations, the description of a hysterical crisis, a contracture, a delicate phase of somnambulism, etc.—in a word, phenomena that I myself had seen and described. So I had not been mistaken; I had not given my subjects an artificial education, since, twenty years ago, spiritists who were hostile to the theory of disaggregation—had they known of it—were nonetheless recording the same facts and the same details. I especially recall an editor of the *Revue spirite*, Mr. Gabriel Chaineau, whose articles I particularly liked. I fear that Mr. Chaineau would be displeased and humiliated to have earned the esteem of a “nihilist,” whom he so thoroughly despises; but I ask him to excuse a sincere sentiment. He had such interesting hysterical subjects, and he described them so well, that I took his religious articles for hospital case studies.

Today, unfortunately, works of this kind no longer contain psychology—and even less clinical content. One no longer finds in the journals those descriptions of séances in which the attitudes of the participants and of the medium were recorded in detail; one no longer reads those conversations in which the questions of the faithful and the responses of the medium were transcribed: “Dear spirit, do you hear me? — Yes, I come to instruct you.” One scarcely even encounters those dissertations written under the dictation of angels, in which the editor modestly concealed himself and attributed all the merit to a famous soul. It truly seems that the editors of these journals have, without realizing it, come under the influence of external forces; they are like those religious believers who remain quite convinced and sincere, yet no longer have the courage to expose their idols to the mockery of the profane. They say to themselves—quite unconsciously as well—“Let us no longer speak of nervous attacks, of contractures, of insensitivity, of memory disturbances, of unconscious movements; these details should be reserved for the believers, who are not troubled by them—but they provoke too much thought among the curious and the skeptical.” The strangest part is that even the readers of these journals make the same observation as I do, and they complain of it bitterly. An excellent spiritist expressed surprise at the congress that not enough séances involving spirit incorporations are recounted anymore—those that were once so convincing.<sup>35</sup> No one paid attention to his complaints. If I may be permitted, I would like to respond to him; I would say: “Sir, you are absolutely right. No one describes for us anymore those mediums who suddenly change their posture and speech, who so perfectly represent another person that it seems a spirit has incarnated in them. That is most unfortunate, for those descriptions were highly entertaining. But this disappearance can be explained. A professor of physiology, whom you probably don’t know, Mr. Charles Richet,

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<sup>35</sup> *Congrès spirite*, p. 205.

took the liberty of reproducing and interpreting these comedies performed by the medium. He very plausibly demonstrated that they involved a variety of somnambulistic hallucinations. And today, one could explain all the details of your former incarnations without invoking even the smallest spirit. Of course, you can rest assured—spiritists will never admit this. But they feel uneasy, troubled; they no longer dare to attempt such portrayals without offering at least a pretense of analysis. Now, that is difficult—and they prefer to remain silent. Perhaps that is more prudent.” This prudence is, moreover, expressed in various passages. One member of the congress says: “We must be wary of those spiritistic phenomena in which unconscious or automatic mental reverberations may be at play... they often explain the failures, the despairing banalities that you obtain under the guise of a Voltaire or a Hugo.”<sup>36</sup> In *La Vie posthume*,<sup>37</sup> we read a very instructive story. In one family, a young child shows mediumistic phenomena; the father, full of enthusiasm, wants to develop them; the mother, guided by her instinct, believes they are dangerous and opposes it. A renowned spiritist is consulted—and, would you believe it, the spiritist sides with the mother. Despite their affected indifference, the spiritists have undergone the influence of psychological research and have been deeply transformed.

Thus we can scarcely point out more than a few interesting psychological facts, gathered here and there in their works. At the congress, a few noteworthy examples of “somnambulistic journeys” are recounted; these are hallucinations in which the medium believes himself transported far away and imagines traveling through distant lands, while his body remains inert.<sup>38</sup> One must note an account of hallucinations experienced during chloroform inhalations, which relates to the serious question of the relationship between hypnotic sleep and chloroform-induced sleep.<sup>39</sup> But I was especially interested in a very curious study of a case of automatic writing. A young peasant served as a medium and directed the talking table. As always, someone asks: “Who is there? — Raymond Dupuy, lord of Montbrun. — Where did you live? — At the Château de Rochechinart.” The spirit goes on to speak of his wife, Fleur de Lis, and of the circumstances that led to his death in the year 1575 (sic).

None of the participants knew of a person by that name, and—an important detail that appears to be true—the medium, questioned after the séance, searched his memory in vain and claimed to be completely unaware of who this lord of Montbrun might be. All historical inquiries proved fruitless; and only later was it discovered that a novel by Mr. Oscar de Poli had been published in serial form in a newspaper a year earlier. In this novel, Rochechinart, Fleur de Lis, Raymond Dupuy—everything, even the date of death written in Roman numerals on a tomb—was exactly as the medium had recounted it in his automatic messages.<sup>40</sup> One detail greatly surprises the author of the article, Mr. A. Goupil: namely, that the medium—whom he has every reason to believe sincere—has absolutely no

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<sup>36</sup> *Congrès spirite*, p. 279 cf.; *ibid.*, 2159.

<sup>37</sup> *Vie posthume*, April 1886.

<sup>38</sup> *Congrès spirite*, p. 323.

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*, p. 347.

<sup>40</sup> *Revue spirite*, 1894, p. 227.

memory of having read that novel. I believe I have seen and described similar facts and may be able to offer an explanation. A psychological phenomenon usually cannot belong to both of the image groups that have divided the medium's mind. When a particular sensation is linked to subconscious acts, there is at that moment a specific and corresponding anesthesia for the ordinary personality. When automatic writing persistently reveals a certain memory, there is a corresponding amnesia for the normal consciousness. No doubt, further inquiries could have been made regarding this interesting case, but even as it is reported, it remains genuinely valuable for experimental psychology. We can only regret that such observations have become increasingly rare in the spiritist journals.

When spiritists now describe experiments, they are of an entirely different kind; they concern what was formerly called the physical phenomena of spiritism. The term is not very accurate, since automatic writing is also a physical phenomenon. Mr. Thury,<sup>41</sup> in his study on Gasparin's turning tables, proposes considering these facts as manifestations of *ecten*ic force (*ekteínō*, to extend), because they all involve an extension of human force beyond the limits of the body, which it ordinarily cannot surpass. Later, these phenomena were referred to by Crookes under the more well-known name *psychic force*,<sup>42</sup> but both terms mean the same thing. Mr. Thury, in his *Letter to a Clergyman* published by Mr. A. Pioda, gives us a classification of these more or less real phenomena. Some elements of his classification do not seem satisfactory to us and, in our view, should be reassigned to other groups of facts; we will therefore mention only the most interesting categories:

- (1) Physical effects: changes produced in matter without muscular action, by ectenic influence (i.e., Crookes's psychic force):
  - a. change in the weight of objects,
  - b. production of a vibratory state in matter, which manifests as sounds heard in walls, etc.,
  - c. production of an aggregate of molecules from which more or less visible forms result, sometimes even photographable.
- (2) Non-muscular mechanical action of an ectenic force upon the self or another person—for example, when the medium rises into the air, i.e., levitation.
- (3) Ectenic phenomena of relations between different persons, without the use of the ordinary senses:
  - a. perception of another's thoughts,
  - b. communication of will.

The first two groups are fairly similar to one another; the third seems, at least for the moment, quite distinct. Thus this classification roughly corresponds to the classical division between *physical phenomena* and *psychic phenomena*, which is

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<sup>41</sup> M. Thury, "Le tavole giranti in attinenza col problema di fisica generale che ne scaturisce," in "Memorabilia" by A. Pioda, p. 318, and "Lettera inedita ad un ecclesiastico americano intorno al fenomeni detti magnetici e spiritici," same work, p. 359.

<sup>42</sup> *Memorabilia*, p. 43.

usually made when one tries to bring some order into the description of the mysterious events alleged by the spiritists.

This is certainly a fine program of study, even when reduced to these terms. No one claims that such research is ridiculous, and Mr. Pioda, in his "*Farewell to the Reader*",<sup>43</sup> spends far too much time defending it. We know very well today that science is not finished and that many marvels remain to be discovered. Reality—which exceeds anything our imagination can conceive—contains things more astonishing than the levitation of a table without contact or than Mr. Home's harmonica playing by itself one of the few tunes in his limited repertoire. One must not constantly ask permission to conduct a study—one must simply conduct it. When psychic force is demonstrated, people will acknowledge it and give it its place in science; so long as it is not demonstrated, there is no use in celebrating it or in attacking its critics.

Well then, can we point to any serious progress in these studies? Clearly not—and on this point, there are very few original observations or investigations. Almost always, one contents oneself with re-publishing, with repeating for the thousandth time a few well-known and now classic accounts. One cannot imagine how many times Crookes's experiments and the details of Home's life have been recounted at the congress and in the spiritist journals.<sup>44</sup> Do they not see that it is always the same thing? And since Mr. Crookes, with all his genius, did not manage to convince us of the accuracy of these facts, do today's spiritists imagine they will succeed—by repeating the same stories, and doing so less skillfully? The only interesting thing to say on this subject is that Mr. Crookes, twenty years after the famous memoir on *The Phenomena of Spiritualism*, still maintains the opinion he had expressed. This is clearly indicated to us in a letter from Crookes to Mr. Pioda, who, as we mentioned, has gathered together all of this author's works on spiritism. What is needed now is something else: to repeat these experiments, verify them, conduct new ones, and thus bring together all these facts into a body of doctrine that connects with the totality of already established sciences.

That is very difficult, one might say, since we no longer have the opportunity to observe such facts and no longer encounter such marvelous subjects. And yet, *La Revue spirite*, from time to time, describes anecdotes quite similar to those that marked Home's career. Here is an individual who cannot touch a chair without it breaking.<sup>45</sup> A child whose mere presence extinguishes candles.<sup>46</sup> Here is the widow Picard doing laundry; her bar of soap slips from her fingers, flies out the door, and reenters through the window.<sup>47</sup> A very fortunate household, which will surely grow rich, sees spirits throwing down gold rings and earrings from the ceiling.<sup>48</sup> One of two things must be true: either the spiritist writers themselves take these stories as jokes—then why do they allow themselves to recount them?

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<sup>43</sup> *Memorabilia*, p. 453.

<sup>44</sup> *Congrès spirite*, p. 42, 83, 104, etc.

<sup>45</sup> *Revue spirite*, 1891, p. 135.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>48</sup> *Congrès spirite*, p. 214.



Or they take them seriously—then why do they not subject the subject to careful study, why do they not repeat Crookes's experiments, why do they relate such unbelievable events in a few lines without any explanation?

"Where I expect the scientist," said a speaker at the spiritist congress, "is in the serious examination of physical phenomena, when he is forced to come to it. I promise him a few surprises."<sup>49</sup> Very well, then; in studying these phenomena, the physicist may perhaps one day discover marvels—but it will be he who discovers them, and the spiritists will not be able to claim any priority, for they appear absolutely incapable of any truly serious study. The facts they call physical are no better described than the phenomenon of automatic writing, and one searches in vain through this entire literature for a single observation or experiment—I do not say demonstrative, but merely interesting. The spiritists have abandoned their former descriptions of psychological facts, and they have found no new study to replace them.

#### IV

The reader who has followed us this far is no doubt somewhat puzzled: he has seen that the current publications of spiritism—journals and books—are innumerable, and on the other hand, he has just come to understand that the spiritists discuss the doctrines of psychologists very little and very rarely, and that they almost no longer describe the phenomena. The reader then wonders what could possibly fill all these journals and volumes. It must be acknowledged with sadness: they are filled with internal quarrels, fratricidal struggles, which now occupy these pages once devoted to pious meditations. And what subject can so arm against one another these gentle spiritists, who dream only of universal brotherhood, of union between the incarnate and the disincarnate? Metaphysics. That ancient spark of discord, which inflamed the schools of the Middle Ages and which seemed to survive only faintly, almost extinguished, in our Faculties, has rekindled more fiercely than ever in the spiritist societies. Spiritist works are now entirely devoted to a very peculiar kind of metaphysics.

But let us first name the combatants and the parties involved. Allan Kardec, who in reality had invented neither automatic writing nor even the belief in spirits, had mainly played the role of organizing into a dogma—of codifying, in a certain sense—vague superstitions that were widespread in all directions. He had described with precision the condition of spirits in the other world, their functions, and their hierarchy, drawing especially from the beliefs of the Catholic Church: the spirits did not object. But the high priest went further; he wanted also to regulate the conduct of men. He demanded obedience, blind belief, and the meticulous practice of ritual. Already during Allan Kardec's lifetime, heretics such as Pierrart and Roustaing<sup>50</sup> dared to raise their voices and demand greater independence; but orthodoxy triumphed. After Allan Kardec's death, the long-suppressed spirit of liberty gave rise—especially among Protestants—to regrettable splits and schisms. "Allan Kardec, after all," one dares to write, "must

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<sup>49</sup> *Congrès spirite*, p. 331.

<sup>50</sup> *La Vie posthume*, February 1887.

only be regarded as the interpreter of a group of spirits canonized by the Catholic Church; he imposed religiosity upon us, prayers, formulas.”<sup>51</sup> “The teaching of spiritist doctrine,” declared Mme. Van Calcar at the congress, representing the Dutch spiritists, “will lead us to dogmatism and sectarianism.”<sup>52</sup> “The enthusiasm of the southern countries blinds you,” she told her French co-religionists. “Your veneration for a valiant worker leads you to exaggerate the merits of spiritist doctrine... and causes you to neglect a harsh, useful, and much-needed critique... his book is a mosaic of fantastical theses; he even prescribes prayers, following the example of priests.”<sup>53</sup> Without going so far as to declare, along with *La Vie posthume*, that there are now among the spiritists dogmatists, critics, and positivists,<sup>54</sup> one must acknowledge that groups have indeed formed: there is a right and a left, not to mention the hesitant center—reactionaries and radicals—commonly designated by the names *Kardecists* and *immortalists*, and they are bitter enemies.

The influence of Allan Kardec had only spread with difficulty among English-speaking nations, and recently these peoples too have sought to give their own interpretation of the mysterious phenomena. I summarize the formation of the theosophical sect according to the work of Mr. Nus,<sup>55</sup> who has described this new movement of ideas quite well. A small group of English and Americans, led by a Russian woman, Madame Blavatsky, undertook some years ago both the revival of the ancient Eastern race and the transfiguration of Western ideas, accomplished through a marriage of convenience between the metaphysics of the Vedas and our experimental sciences. According to the theosophists, an occult brotherhood of Tibetan Buddhists, whom they refer to as *mahatmas* or *masters*, possessing knowledge and powers beyond the horizon of our understanding and the reach of our current abilities, inspires and oversees the movement. “It is not the present-day Brahmins,” Madame Blavatsky tells us, “who possess this knowledge; they are profoundly ignorant; they join the theosophical society, eager to belong to a center where they might from time to time encounter a true *mahatma* in flesh and blood, arriving from the other side of the great mountain.”<sup>56</sup> It must be acknowledged that this happiness rarely comes to them, for no one has ever seen one of these masters, who, according to the theosophists of Madras, manipulate astral matter on the mountains of Tibet. Only one of them, the great Koot Hoomi, deigned to send letters to Madame Blavatsky; having arrived by mysterious means, these letters would fall from the sky or from the ceiling of the room, landing precisely at the feet of the recipient. The theosophical society has recently been grievously afflicted by the death of Madame Blavatsky, but it will probably continue its work under the leadership of Colonel Olcott, Mr. A. Sinnett, and other lieutenants. The theosophists hold the humble spiritists in great contempt

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<sup>51</sup> *La Vie posthume*, 1887, p. 182.

<sup>52</sup> *Congrès spirite*, p. 305.

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*, *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *La Vie posthume*, 1887, p. 183.

<sup>55</sup> Nus, *A la recherche des destinées*.

<sup>56</sup> *Lotus*, September 1887, p. 329.

and consider them “incapable of knowing the *Veiled Isis*, who reveals the final mysteries only after long trials to the elect of initiation.”<sup>57</sup>

Theosophy seduced, by its obscurity and by the reputation for erudition it confers upon its initiates, a certain number of French spiritists. These, who were not enemies of publicity, did not want to modestly enlist under the banner of Madame Blavatsky; they wrote only briefly in the journal *Le Lotus*, and soon formed a separate group. But it was necessary to place themselves under some aegis, to invent masters as well—masters all the more revered for being more invisible. The East was already taken; the occultists turned instead to the magicians of the West. “They declared themselves members of the mysterious circles of Martinism and the Rosicrucians, disciples of the Kabbalah, under the invocation of Paracelsus, Van Helmont, Konrath, Fabre d’Olivet, Louis Lucas, Eliphas Lévy, and others more or less famous in the annals of Initiation. Personal struggles more than ideological ones.”<sup>58</sup> The occultists were first mystics;<sup>59</sup> today, they have elevated themselves to the dignity of mages. We would have been quite at a loss to define what a mage is, if the most famous among them had not spared us the trouble. “What is magism?” declares the Sar Peladan: “It is the supreme culture, the synthesis presupposing all analyses, the highest combined result of hypothesis joined to experience, the patriciate of intelligence and the crowning of science blended with art. Moreover, magism can be called the patrimony of high minds across time, place, and race, always preserved... The minimum of a mage is made of three things: genius, character, independence.”<sup>60</sup> Let us not be surprised, then, that there are only six mages in all: “the Sar Peladan, Abbé Lacuria, the Marquis de Saint-Yves, de Guaita, Papus, Barlet; the rest is made up of all the idlers, of all the failures.”<sup>61</sup> The mages are, for the poor spiritists, terrible adversaries—just as proud as the theosophists, almost as incomprehensible; they are more violent and more coarse, and they provoke them to continual combats.

The struggle among these various doctrines is not always courteous: Mockery and insults rain down from all sides. Here are a few of the cries we have discerned in the fray: “When one asks you for proofs,” says Madame Van Calcar, an *immortalist*, “you present us with fictions, fantastical novels, poetic reveries.”<sup>62</sup> “We are the white ray of the spectrum,” cry the theosophists, “you are nothing but a vulgar colored ray.”<sup>63</sup> “To be content with one’s lot,” bitterly replies the Kardecist spiritist, “is the regime of good folk, of the masses who toil and plow all the furrows; the 1889 congress has proved it well: throughout the world, millions of thinkers are satisfied with belief in their own eternity, in their relationships with their dear departed, in the plurality of existences—and they even believe that the congress could quite advantageously have done without the

<sup>57</sup> Nus, *A la recherche des destinées*, p. 88.

<sup>58</sup> Nus, *A la recherche des destinées*, p. 136.

<sup>59</sup> *Lotus*, May 1887.

<sup>60</sup> *Déclaration du Sar Peladan dans l’enquête sur l’évolution littéraire de Huret*. 1891, pp. 39-40.

<sup>61</sup> *Déclaration du Sar Peladan dans l’enquête sur l’évolution littéraire de Huret*. 1891, p. 39.

<sup>62</sup> *Congrès spirite*, p. 306.

<sup>63</sup> *Revue spirite*, 1891, p. 2.

vain theosophists, neo-Buddhists with exorbitant pretensions, who possess the absolute truth... The Buddhist logomachy displeases us utterly—and with good reason.”<sup>64</sup> “The charlatans, the loud drummers and the conjurors—to use a polite term,” howls an initiate, “are at fault for thinking the public more foolish than it is.”<sup>65</sup> An occultist, with a sarcastic laugh, ridicules the sanctimonious tone of the good spirits and the moral lessons given by Melchizedek with the help of Elijah.<sup>66</sup> “You are nothing but vain fools with your borrowed titles: mage, marquis, sovereign, master of the Catholic Rosy Cross, sar, legate, bishop; you all suffer from delusions of grandeur,” retorts *Le Moniteur Spirite*.<sup>67</sup> “Your mediums are poor invalids, unconsciously habitual practitioners of cerebral onanism.”<sup>68</sup> “Yours only receive dishonest and filthy communications... Tell me whom you haunt, and I’ll tell you who you are.”<sup>69</sup> “Fancy-pants of occultism... tenors of mystery, tightrope walkers of an invisible bell, marionettes in black suits whose strings are merely hidden.”<sup>70</sup> “The occultists are sly, ignorant, conceited, etc.”<sup>71</sup> Let us abbreviate these quotations—our readers have now understood what fills half of the *Spiritist Reviews*.

The second half of the Spiritist Reviews is devoted to the endlessly repeated exposition of certain religious or metaphysical doctrines unique to each sect. In general, studies of pure theology are rare, and the spiritists—this is rather curious—concern themselves very little with the problem of the existence of God, of providence, or of related questions. At the spiritist congress, they had even completely suppressed, by a sort of preliminary motion, any religious discussion, and even the very name of God was not to be pronounced.<sup>72</sup> Only by exception do certain journals have a religious character. *Le Journal Spirite de l’Est* has a soft, unctuous, quite distinctive tone; it considers itself the sole representative of religion in a century of immorality and atheism. It offers consolation and faith to all those who find the practices of official religions repugnant.<sup>73</sup> *La Revue Spirite de Berlin* likewise presents “spiritism as the savior of humanity, the only force capable of rescuing it from the abyss of unbelief, selfishness, and materialism.”<sup>74</sup> Theosophy borrows from the ancient Hindus their gigantic pantheism: beings, after a thousand wanderings, will all come to merge into one, who will be God. “What this whole composed of all individualities might be,” says Mr. Sinnett, “what this kind of entirely different and new existence might be, traversed by these thousand myriads of individualities merged into one—this is the question upon which the greatest non-initiated thinkers cannot shed the slightest light.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Revue spirite*, 1891, p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> *Lotus bleu*, 1891, March. *Revue spirite*, 1891, p. 184.

<sup>66</sup> *Initiation*, July, 1891, p. 87.

<sup>67</sup> *Moniteur spirite*, May, 1891, p. 83.

<sup>68</sup> *Initiation*, 1890, p. 114.

<sup>69</sup> *Moniteur spirite*, May, 1891, p. 97.

<sup>70</sup> *Moniteur spirite*, 1891, p. 89.

<sup>71</sup> *Id.*, *ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>72</sup> *Congrès spirite*, p. 166.

<sup>73</sup> *Journal spirite de l’Est*, 1890, p. 19.

<sup>74</sup> *Spiritualistische blätter*, January, 1889.

<sup>75</sup> Nus, *A la recherche des destinées*, p. 109.

Unfortunately, the initiated thinkers are careful not to reveal to us their divine meditations on this point; this is most regrettable.

The doctrines will naturally be more precise concerning the theory of the immortality of the soul. In general, the spiritists are almost all forced to accept it: “the survival of souls will have become, thanks to us, a scientific hypothesis and not a metaphysical theory.”<sup>76</sup> But the contradictions begin when it comes to specifying the nature of this immortality. The Kardecists admit the reincarnation of souls into new bodies: “this reincarnation under determined conditions must be considered a true moral sanction; undoubtedly we do not have the memory of our former existences, but that would be too sad and harmful to our progress... However, we currently have tastes, innate dispositions that can only be explained by these former existences.”<sup>77</sup> According to others, reincarnation is not determined by moral sanction; it depends on the absolutely free choice of the spirits.<sup>78</sup> The immortalists, on the contrary—those liberal spiritists found in Holland, America, and Protestant countries—absolutely reject reincarnation, “that sort of metempsychosis.”<sup>79</sup> They put forward arguments that seem interesting to me: “Suppose that John has died and that his spirit with his perispirit has been reincarnated into the individuality of Peter, currently living. What would happen if one were to evoke John by the procedures of necromancy or spiritism?”<sup>80</sup> Another even more serious argument: “The dogma of reincarnation is dangerous, for it inspires depraved spirits with the desire to obtain a new body at any cost, and it is to be feared that they may go on to obsess small children and pregnant women.”<sup>81</sup> A discussion on this point would have been quite remarkable; unfortunately it is cut short. The Kardecists are content to respond to their American adversaries that they reject reincarnation out of racial pride, for fear of returning to the world in the body of a little Black child.<sup>82</sup> The question remains unresolved.

The theosophists present a beautiful vision of immortality and reincarnation that is at times grandiose. After death, we seemingly experience a complete forgetting of our wretched existence and we begin again efforts that have often been so imperfect and so unfortunate. “Forgetfulness clears away our vices, our insignificant memories in order to allow us to move forward, lightened of the weight of our faults.”<sup>83</sup> But after thousands of such existences, we attain that degree of spirituality where the rosary of all past lives unrolls before our eyes. In this way, we reach paradise, the devachan. “Devachanic life is not only the reward for all the good we have sown in our life, but also the realization of what we dreamed for others and for ourselves,”<sup>84</sup> and perhaps, after thousands of series of existences and devachans, we may come to form superior spirits, Dhyan Chohans,

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<sup>76</sup> *Vie posthume*, February, 1887.

<sup>77</sup> *Journal spirite de l'Est*, 1890, p. 20.

<sup>78</sup> *Revue spirite*, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>79</sup> *Congrès spirite*, p. 305.

<sup>80</sup> *Initiation*, 1890, p. 107.

<sup>81</sup> *Congrès spirite*, p. 306.

<sup>82</sup> Nus, *A la recherche des destinées*, p. 209.

<sup>83</sup> *Id.*, *ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>84</sup> *Id.*, *ibid.*, p. 95.

those geniuses who preside over the evolution of worlds and who are atoms of the divine unity. And in every discourse, the adepts strive to explain, to render this beautiful Hindu dream possible; they distinguish the personality—this transient, passing form that the ego takes on in each new incarnation—from the individuality that persists through the series of existences.<sup>85</sup> “The series of human lives are threaded like pearls on a single and unique string, and the periodic rebirths and deaths are analogous to waking and sleeping.”<sup>86</sup>

To understand immortality and to support their theses, the spiritists must adopt a particular theory on the constitution of man. Thus, there is no subject more frequently treated or that inspires more reveries. The man of Allan Kardec was quite simple: a soul, a body, and between the two a perispirit that one did not seek to understand, and which served to explain everything. But for some time now, our nature seems to have become quite complicated. Allan Kardec was not scientific enough, we are told; one must reason better than he did. Science teaches us that the spectrum contains seven colors; now it is obvious that man greatly resembles the colored spectrum, and no one will hesitate to see in him seven parts: the material body, the astral body, the spiritual body, etc.<sup>87</sup> Not at all, replies another; each man is a microcosm resembling the universe; now, the universe comprises three parts: humanity, the visible world, and the invisible world; each part naturally divides into 3,  $3 \times 3 = 9$ , therefore man comprises 9 parts and not 7, this is obvious.<sup>88</sup> But no, says a mage interrupting the discussion, man resembles a cab, this is incontestable: the coachman is the soul; the carriage is the material body, and the horse is life.<sup>89</sup> Every week one can find in a spiritist review a comparison of this sort, as poetic as it is scientific. The theosophist proceeds by a metaphysical method perhaps a little less naïve: he begins by inventing all the operations, all the functions that man is capable of performing throughout the innumerable existences he is attributed; then he transforms each of these functions into a substance, into a soul. It is a surprising substantialism, such as is only encountered in the grand periods of scholasticism. Moreover, it would not be absurd to say, with several authors, that the state of mind in India which gave birth to this system corresponds rather well to that of our Middle Ages. To take an example, we have said that the theosophists distinguish the personality—particular form of one of our momentary existences—from the individuality which persists through all existences; naturally they imagine two souls, one to explain the formation of the personality, the other to explain individuality. In general—since each prolific writer creates souls as he pleases—the theosophists distinguish seven substances in man:

- (1) the material body, *Rupa*;
- (2) the vital principle, *Jiva*;

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<sup>85</sup> *Revue spirite*, 1891, p. 178.

<sup>86</sup> *Lotus bleu*, July 25, 1891.

<sup>87</sup> *Revue spirite*, 1891, p. 149.

<sup>88</sup> *Moniteur soirite*, May, 1891, p. 109.

<sup>89</sup> *Initiation*, September 1890, 506.

- (3) the astral body, *Linga Sharira*, which is the double of the material body, more ethereal than it, ordinarily visible and not tangible, invented, I believe, to explain ghostly apparitions;
- (4) the animal soul, which contains selfish appetites, *Kama Rupa*;
- (5) the human soul or the personality, *Manas*;
- (6) the spiritual soul or the permanent individuality, *Buddhi*;
- (7) the divine soul, spark of the divinity contained in our being, *Atma*.

I do not offer these interpretations as incontestable, nor do I claim to always understand the language dictated to initiates by the mahatmas. *Le Lotus Bleu* gives certain extracts from the works of Mme Blavatsky; they are translations accompanied by a perpetual commentary at the bottom of the pages and followed by a glossary. Well then, despite all this apparatus, it has often happened to me to understand nothing at all. Moreover, here are more authentic and perhaps preferable definitions: “The spiritual and divine Ego is the spiritual soul or *Buddhi*, in its close union with *Manas*, the principle of intelligence, without which it is not at all an Ego, but simply the atmic vehicle.”<sup>90</sup> “The higher self is *Atma*, the inseparable ray of the unique and universal self; it is rather God above us than God in us; blessed is the man who manages to saturate his lower ego with it.”<sup>91</sup> Analogous explanations and subdivisions are found in all truly occult Reviews; they are only sometimes complicated by anatomical speculations. Is the vital soul housed in the great sympathetic nerve or in the blood globules, or in both at once? That is a great and worthy subject for meditation.

What remains to be explained, by means of these theories, are the phenomena presented by the medium—and it is on this point that the battle is fought with the greatest ferocity. How far we are from that excellent medium making a table turn under the guidance of a good angel, or writing under the dictation of Melchizedek! The occultists have replaced all that with I know not what hideous dream, filled with obscurity and horror. It appears that after our death, the higher principles of our being are released, but the lower principles remain on the earth and in the air in the state of husks or repugnant rags.<sup>92</sup> These empty sheaths are inferior beings, wicked and dangerous; they are called elementals, or elementaries, or by all sorts of names. “The vehicle of potential, in desire of objectivity, thus overflows—and I insist on this—with forms sometimes hideous, which the brush of Goya would be powerless to render in all their horror. These specters, obscure and fallen beings, semi-conscious, of limited intelligence like the elementals, or brutish and unconscious like the larvæ proper, want at all costs to incarnate—they are the lemures of every kind.”<sup>93</sup> And when the innocent medium places their hand on the table, they no longer resist, they surrender, and they become the prey of all these monsters. “Mediums are for the most part poor valetudinarian souls, unwittingly accustomed to a kind of cerebral onanism, and who walk through life escorted, obsessed, often devoured by larvæ; they only coagulate by draining, since it is from them that they borrow the plastic substance

<sup>90</sup> *Lotus bleu*, July 1891, p. 41.

<sup>91</sup> *Id.*, *ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>92</sup> *Revue Spirite*, 1891, p. 150.

<sup>93</sup> *Initiation*, February 1890, p. 114.

they need in order to objectify and become perceptible.”<sup>94</sup> On this point, I share the indignation of the good spiritists; when I see a young girl exhibiting automatic writing, I prefer to say quite simply that she is a hysteric: it is less lugubrious.

This overly simple solution is accepted by no party, and they wage furious battles, hurling at one another elementals, larvæ, the astral body, the fluidic atmosphere. In this confused mêlée, nothing is distinguishable anymore: the precise observations, the serious discussions, the experimental verifications that we were seeking are all entirely forgotten. The books and the journals are filled only with insults and fantastical metaphysics.

Spiritism has changed—that is our overall impression, which is quite impartial. That it may have initially presented a religious and mystical character is possible, but it was above all founded on the observation of a fact. It was this curious fact, as real as it was unexplained, that aroused curiosity, that was reproduced in a hundred ways, that was described minutely and that fueled the spiritist literature. Today, this fact is nothing anymore—not because it no longer exists, but simply because it has been accepted and studied by scientific minds. Now, people demand of the spiritists, concerning their phenomenon, studies that they do not want—or rather, that they cannot—undertake. The best will in the world is not enough to suddenly make one a clinician and an observer of nervous diseases; the moment one must go beyond elementary analysis, the spiritists feel incompetent and recuse themselves. Spiritism was above all, in its primitive and true character, the study of *talking tables*; since it now scorns them and leaves them aside, it has renounced what constituted its very reason for being. Allan Kardec would no longer recognize his degenerate sons and would himself declare that his doctrine is losing more and more the character he had given it.

The former adepts of spiritism then sought another phenomenon—less known, less studied—that could replace the first; but they have not yet found it. For they cannot repeat at will the actions of Crookes' psychic force, as they used to repeat automatic writing. Moreover, these phenomena, which still appear mysterious, are already being studied from various sides. Today's science is hardly narrow-minded or fearful, and it readily tackles supposedly new questions. The *Society for Psychical Research* in England, and the *Annales des sciences psychiques* of M. Dariex in France,<sup>95</sup> collect and analyze all facts of this kind. If there is anything true in the legends of ectenic or psychic force, in the still extraordinary experiments on mental suggestion, in cases of lucidity that seem both incredible and real, all of that will soon be clarified, distinguished, and reduced to its proper proportions. The former magnetizer and the former spiritist who worked in secret, who observed curious facts every day and could not manage to present them, no longer have any reason for being. If today they have in their hands a somnambulist with extra-lucidity, or a medium who rises into the air, all the most competent scientists will rush in to study it. The former spiritism was thus forced

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<sup>94</sup> *Initiation*, February 1890, p. 114.

<sup>95</sup> *Annales des sciences psychiques, recueil d'observations et d'expériences*, Under the direction of M. Dr. Dariex, published every two months, by F. Alcan.



either to disappear as useless by connecting itself to medico-psychological studies, or to profoundly change.

It is this modification that we have tried to make understood by giving a few examples of the spiritist ramblings on God, on the soul, on the afterlife. M. Paulhan, in an interesting study on “the new mysticism,” notes—exaggerating it somewhat, in my opinion—the religious character of current spiritism. “For them,” he says, “the practical part of spiritism is not the most important from the point of view of acquiring beliefs; one must first believe in the doctrine.”<sup>96</sup> That was not the case just fifteen years ago, but today the statement is fairly accurate: it is now merely a question of doctrine. But can we say, as M. Paulhan does, that this involves religious beliefs and that we are witnessing a revival of ancient mysticism? I am not convinced of it. A religion speaks with authority in the name of a master, imposes a certain unity of belief, forbids irreverent discussions. Here we see no respected master; instead of unity of belief, the most complete cacophony; instead of reverence, quarrels and insults. The religious tone, when it exists among the spiritists, is not proper to them—it depends on prior religious education. The reading of these various works leaves me with a very different impression; I do not see a return to religion, but a strange resurrection of something somewhat too forgotten: old metaphysics.

The disappearance of religions does not eliminate the problems they claimed to resolve, and man remains ever preoccupied with the mysteries of providence and of the afterlife. Philosophy, I believe it must be acknowledged, insists greatly on the powerlessness of the human mind to go beyond itself, on the insoluble nature of such questions, and in reality seems to concern itself with them less and less. Metaphysics has declined in France—this is undeniable; it is easy to indicate the courses to take and the books to read in order to learn psychology or logic, but no one knows how to guide those who seek studies in metaphysics. And yet, there are very many who wish to approach the old questions of religion by the light of reason. They are not entirely wrong; there is truth, and at least a nearly convincing beauty, in many of the great old metaphysical systems, which could be presented with more confidence and enthusiasm. Moreover, to every era of civilization and every stage of scientific development there must correspond a metaphysics, even if it is only a set of general ideas on nature and man, a synthesis of the latest conclusions of the particular sciences. In our time, there have been enough advances—even upheavals—in the physical sciences and in moral studies for one to legitimately call for a new overarching conception and a rejuvenated metaphysics. No doubt it would be only a hypothesis and a beautiful dream, but humanity needs these beautiful dreams that summarize the past and sometimes allow a glimpse of the future.

Those who do not know Descartes, Leibniz, and Hegel well enough are not for that reason entirely deprived of metaphysics—they invent one for their own use. The philosophical dissertations that make up the greater part of all the spiritist journals have distinctly recognizable common traits. They are long, convoluted, very obscure, filled with personifications and metaphors. While reading them, I could not help but notice a family resemblance, a distant

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<sup>96</sup> Fr. Paulhan, *Le nouveau mysticism* (*Revue Philosophique*, 1890, II, p. 494).

similarity to certain literary works seen somewhere before. They resemble to a fault the interminable novels serialized in small newspapers. It is the same adventures and the same style. What melodramas and popular novels are to literature, spiritist and theosophical theories are to philosophy. There is a popular metaphysics beneath classical metaphysics, and we would be wrong to scorn it—especially to ignore its existence.

On the contrary, it seems curious to us to note that the taste for philosophy—for the success of these publications proves nothing else—is increasingly penetrating all classes of the population, and even that this curiosity for transcendental speculations appears more intense and more active among the less educated than among professional philosophers. In reality, one must admit, there was no gathering in 1889 of philosophers proper from different countries, whereas the spiritist congress, assembling 40,000 people, was in essence a philosophical congress, where, outside of any religious denomination, matter, thought, and the explanation of the world were discussed. This is merely an insignificant fact, but nevertheless it is a meaningful one. Who was more at fault: the spiritists, in trying to explain things with what light and education they had, or the philosophers, in standing apart, refusing to present and especially to revise their ancient conceptions? But there has been a congress of psychology, and there are every day numerous studies on moral facts, on societies, on the human mind. These new studies have replaced the old philosophy, and they fear above all a renewed development of metaphysical instruction, which would be a true reaction. A strange error; experimental psychology is no longer philosophy, any more than astronomy or medicine is. It is an independent science that took its first steps under the guidance of philosophy, but which is beginning to walk on its own and has given sufficient proof of its vitality. Far from having anything to fear from a restoration of metaphysics, it should rejoice in it as a personal success, for it will have contributed more than any other study to the transformation of general ideas. That is why we observe, without any reluctance, that the studies on somnambulism and unconscious acts, by destroying the childish superstitions of the old spiritists, have created a great void in their thinking; and we would gladly see higher and broader metaphysical doctrines—which would thus pose no danger to scientific inquiry—provide guidance to all those curious and misled minds who feel and express the need for an explanation, for a belief, for a hope.

The spiritists will forgive me, I hope, for the few words in this study that might displease them; it is not always possible to speak seriously about things that are not serious. I recognize that almost all of them, with a few inevitable exceptions, are sincere and disinterested, and I do not hide the sympathy inspired in me by their interesting research and adventurous explanations. The best way to show them this sympathy is to point out the usefulness of their works; they once taught us a great number of previously unknown psychological facts; today, they show us the necessity of the study and teaching of moral and metaphysical doctrines.

Pierre Janet